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ABSTRACT

The Japanese specialization of the University of South Carolina's (USC) Master of International Business Studies (MIBS) program includes a 6-month internship at a foreign or Japanese company in Japan. While foreign companies in Japan are receptive to the assistance American student interns provide, promoting such internships to Japanese companies has sometimes been difficult. Sponsoring an internship to a foreign student in a non-technical field is alien to many Japanese firms, and companies are unprepared to provide training to foreign interns without solid roots in the organization. The internship structure and assignment of interns varies greatly depending on the company, with Japanese companies providing more general training and assigning less responsibility to interns than foreign companies do. A survey of 18 companies participating in the USC program indicates that all consider the internship experience beneficial and most will sponsor another intern. In general, the companies very favorably rated the students' preparation in Japanese language, culture, and business practice as well as their interpersonal skills. Host company experiences with accommodating the American interns were generally good, with most companies feeling they had learned from the experience. Eight companies saw a need for improvement in their accommodation of interns. The MIBS Internship Program in Japan questionnaire is appended. Contains 11 references. (MSE)

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PERCEPTIONS OF JAPANESE CORPORATIONS TOWARD INTERNSHIP TRAINING FOR AMERICAN GRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENTS

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Introduction

Business between Japan and the United States has become the largest and most important bilateral economic relationship in the world. Japanese investment in the United States has been rapidly increasing, with over 6,000 Japanese corporations (including over 1,500 manufacturing plants) in the U.S. Americans, in turn, are striving to make rapid advances in the Japanese market. In fact, many American businesses have succeeded in Japan. Companies such as Schick, Polaroid, Coca Cola, and IBM, to name a few, command a major share in the Japanese market.

Given these circumstances, there is a great need to educate business people to have a working knowledge of the culture and language in the two countries and to interact effectively in conducting business between both. In the United States especially, the need to educate bilingual and bicultural business executives to be familiar with Japanese corporate culture and its practices is critically needed.

In recent years, an increasing number of International Business Studies Programs in the United States has become interested in placing students at Japanese companies for internship training in order to educate their students bilingually and biculturally.

Since its inception in 1982, the Japanese Specialization of the Master of International Business Studies (MIBS) Program at the University of South Carolina has included a six-month internship training program at a company in Japan. This internship training provides an opportunity for students to apply the Japanese language and business knowledge gained in the program while testing their ability to adapt to a Japanese work environment and learn about Japanese corporate cultures, strategies, and operations.

Many sponsoring companies regard the internship as an excellent means of evaluating the student as a potential employee, while other companies regard their interns as valuable resources for the internationalization of operations. Still others utilize interns as temporary manpower for specific projects.

However, the course of developing companies in Japan to sponsor internships is sometimes quite difficult. Sponsoring an internship to a foreign student in a non-technical field is alien to many Japanese firms, and these companies are simply not prepared to provide pertinent training to foreign interns who do not have solid roots in the organization.

This paper, based on survey data and the presenter's experience as an internship promoter in Japan, briefly describes the internship portion of the MIBS program in Japan. It also discusses the perception of the sponsoring companies regarding American graduate student interns and the company's experience in providing training in non-technical fields.

The Japanese Specialization of the MIBS Program

The University of South Carolina (USC) began offering a two-year Master of International Business Studies (MIBS) degree program in 1974. It is an interdepartmental program, and faculty members from the Departments of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Government and International Studies, and Geography join with the College of Business Administration to instruct the graduate students. In order to provide a complete training program for future managers of international business, the rigorous curriculum focuses on four areas of development: 1) analytical and problem-solving ability in the international business environment; 2) foreign language proficiency; 3) cultural sensitivity; and 4) overseas work experience. Students are required to complete an intensive business curriculum and to develop significant foreign language and area studies competencies.

In 1982, three-year specializations in Japanese and Arabic were added to the two-year specializations in German, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and English (for foreign nationals). Two new language specializations have recently been added to the program--Korean (in 1989) and Italian (in 1990). Russian and Chinese language specializations are being proposed for the near future.

The basic structure of the three-year Japanese MIBS specialization is as follows:

Phase I.	First eight-week Intensive Summer Japanese Language Training.
Phase II.	Two semesters of intensive international business courses combined with Japanese business language studies.
Phase III.	Second eight-week Intensive Summer Japanese Language Training.
Phase IV.	Two semesters of Japanese language studies at a Japanese university.
Phase V.	Six-month internship at a company in Japan.
Phase VI.	One semester of international business courses and special projects at USC.

As stated previously, development of significant language competence is an essential part of the MIBS program. Due to the non-Western and non-Indo-European nature of the Japanese culture and language, students in the Japanese specialization are required to spend a substantial amount of time and energy to become proficient in the language. Therefore, two semesters of Japanese language studies at a Japanese university are included prior to the internship training.

In order to provide more effective training, the Japanese specialization maintains a relatively small enrollment. Approximately 10-15 students who have high GPA and GMAT scores and preferably some work experience are selected from among a large number of

applicants each year. Previous study of the Japanese language is not required for admission to the program, but more than half of the students have usually had some experience with the language, including a number of students who have actually lived in Japan.

The goal of the Japanese language training is for students to be able to function, not only in day-to-day communication skills, but also in business operations with their Japanese counterparts. This goal may seem ambitious, but the majority of graduates attain this. The results of the oral proficiency exams given to the students upon returning from their assignments in Japan, and the internship evaluation completed by the Japanese internship supervisors indicates that the majority of the returnees' level of Japanese proficiency is at an advanced level. Some have even reached a superior level based on the ACTFL's proficiency rating.

Internship Training in Japan

The internship portion of the MIBS program is an integral part of the training for a position in an international enterprise. The major purpose of this internship is to provide an opportunity to test the student's capability of applying the knowledge gained through study in the MIBS program to work situations at a company in Japan. The secondary purpose is for the student to learn about Japanese corporate culture, structure, and strategy.

Sponsoring companies consider an internship to be a valuable resource in the internationalization of their operations, temporary support for a specific project, or an excellent means of evaluating and recruiting the student for potential employment.

The six-month internship usually begins in mid-July upon completion of language studies at the Japanese university, and ends in January of the following year. The internship is designed to include "real work" experience, meaning that the company

sponsoring the internship should utilize the student in day-to-day operations and/or on a project task force, while encouraging the student to be involved in the company's operations as much as possible.

As of March 1990, a total of twenty-five companies have sponsored internships for the MIBS program in Japan--ten of these are Japanese, and the remaining are subsidiaries of American or other foreign companies. The majority of these continue to sponsor internships.

The placement of the student interns is arranged by the staff of the MIBS program, particularly the internship promoter, and this often requires very time-consuming efforts. The initial internship discussion with a company usually takes place more than a year before actual placement occurs. Matching the interests and needs of a company with those of the student is not an easy task; good "nemawashi," or ground work is required. Also, the perception of what an internship should be often differs between Japanese companies and their American counterparts. Developing an internship opportunity at Japanese companies tends to be more difficult and more time consuming than at American companies.

Almost all large- and medium-size Japanese companies have in-house training programs for their employees. In regard to internships, some companies, especially manufacturing companies in high technology fields, prefer to sponsor technical interns from allied companies, or from governments of foreign countries.

According to a 1989 survey conducted by the Association of Automotive Parts Industries in Japan among their Japanese member companies, of 160 respondents, forty (one-fourth) have sponsored foreign interns, and an additional twenty-three are considering sponsorship (Sangyo Shimbun, July 27, 1989). Also, as announced at the Paris summit held

in July 1989, the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) will assist the economic development of Eastern Europe by accepting several hundred Poles and Hungarians annually for six-month management training sessions at companies and government organizations in Japan. (Yomiuri Shimbun, Oct. 16, 1989).

Until recently, the concept of sponsoring foreign interns in the field of business management was alien to most Japanese companies. However, the recent trend for large Japanese corporations to consider sponsoring internships to foreign students in their international operations is being found to have positive benefits, although accommodation of foreign interns with non-technical internships depends upon the company. Companies like Sony, Hitachi, and New Japan Securities have set up successful internship programs for foreign students, and continue to sponsor MIBS interns.

On the other hand, the situation for foreign companies in Japan is quite different. Recently, more foreign companies have been cracking into the lucrative Japanese market. This is especially true among banks and securities firms following the deregulation of Japan's financial markets. Many such companies suffer from an insufficient number of bilingual/bicultural staff who have international business knowledge and are able to effectively conduct business in Japan. Under such circumstances, the MIBS students are often readily accepted as interns, sometimes receiving job offers from the internship company upon completion of the program.

As previously mentioned, the structure of, and assignments for, the internship vary widely depending upon the company. Japanese companies tend to provide interns with more general training in a number of functional areas or departments, and have them assist in their international operations. American companies tend to assign more specific projects

and utilize interns to assist in their operations in Japan. Working as a mere bilingual assistant to the company is avoided wherever possible.

There are many types of assignments that students have had as interns. They have worked as market analysts, financial analysts, import/export assistants, financial researchers, product specialists, and treasury assistants, to name a few.

In the first phase of the internship, the student is typically required to study the company, familiarizing himself with structure, functions, personnel, etc. Especially at Japanese companies, the intern is often treated as if he were hired into a specific department as a regular employee. There have been cases when an intern has been allowed to participate in a company's new employee orientation, affording him a glimpse into how Japanese college graduates are indoctrinated into their corporations.

An example of one internship assignment is the experience of an intern who worked at a foreign securities firm in Tokyo. He had assignments in all four major divisions of the firm; Equities Research and Sales, Bond Sales and Trading, Swaps and Special Transactions, and Corporate Finance. The intern's assignments in the first two months in the Equities Research and Sales division included:

- daily preparation and presentation of an international market news summary to the morning meeting of the securities analysts and sales staff.
- daily translation of Japanese newspaper articles for an international news service.
- preparation of financial data for Swiss franc bond issues.
- report on the Nikkei 500 companies and their sectoral breakdowns by market capitalization.
- numerous client visits along with the firm's securities analysts.
- study of the Japanese oil refining industry, culminating in the publishing of a weekly report on the deregulation of the industry.

The student was able to fully utilize his business knowledge and experience as well as his language and cultural knowledge. At the same time, he was able to study the company's operations in depth. Consequently, he was offered a position at this company after graduation, and is now working in their Tokyo office as a regular employee.

Another example is a student who interned at a Japanese securities firm in Tokyo. He also trained at various departments of the company, including the Investment Information Department, the International Planning & Control Department, and the Futures & Options Department. After studying the infrastructure of the company and the Japanese financial markets, this student analyzed and developed various computer programs for pricing options, analyzed futures using Lotus 1-2-3, and translated weekly articles on the latest developments in the Japanese stock market for English newspapers. He lived in the company's dormitory, and was able to learn a great deal concerning Japanese corporate culture and the company's operations and strategies. Two other students who interned at this same securities firm, took the Japanese brokerage exam during their internships and successfully received their Japanese Security Brokers License.

Perception of the Sponsoring Companies Regarding American MIBS Interns

Toward the end of the training period, companies that sponsor internships for MIBS students are asked to complete an evaluation (provided by USC) of the intern's performance. The evaluation form is designed to solicit a candid appraisal of the intern's performance and progress in various areas. Although the specific items in the evaluation and the responses to these items are not available to the public, the companies generally evaluate highly, and indicate that the interns have met expectations. To the present, all companies have indicated that the internship experience was beneficial, and most have

shown an interest in sponsoring another MIBS intern. In addition, the students who have completed their internship have reported that their experience in Japan was an invaluable contribution toward their future career.

For the purpose of obtaining more information on how these companies perceived the internship, and what they thought about the interns, a short survey questionnaire (see appendix) was prepared and mailed to twenty-five companies in Japan that have sponsored internships for MIBS. In order to solicit frank opinions, the questionnaire was requested to be returned unsigned. A total of eighteen, or 72%, of the companies returned the questionnaires. The result of questions that sought to discover some of the companies' perceptions concerning the intern's preparation, ability, and attitudes in the areas of language, culture, and interpersonal relations is shown in Table 1.

In general, the student's preparation in the areas of Japanese language, culture, and business practices were evaluated highly, as were the intern's interpersonal skills. The majority of companies rated their interns in the very good or good range. The companies were asked to comment on their ratings, and five companies stated that the interns' language and cultural preparations were superb and that the students were readily able to learn the depth of Japanese corporate culture. They further stated that it was fairly easy for the company to supervise the interns. Two other companies indicated that in spite of the student's fluency in spoken Japanese, the interns sometimes had a difficult time understanding and/or writing business documents that contained a great deal of kanji (Chinese characters).

Regarding preparations and attitudes in interpersonal skills with superiors, supervisors, and Japanese workers, all companies appraised the interns with either very

Table 1

Rating the Intern's Preparation, Ability, and Attitudes in the Areas of Language, Culture, and Interpersonal Relations

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
Japanese language-- in general	16 88.9	0	2 11.1	0	18 100%
Japanese language-- daily conversation	12 66.7	4 22.2	2 11.1	0	18 100%
Japanese language-- at work	1 5.6	15 83.3	2 11.1	0	18 100%
Japanese language-- reading skills	4 22.2	10 55.6	2 11.1	0	18 100%
Japanese language-- writing skills	0	14 77.8	4 22.2	0	18 100%
Japanese culture, society and people	12 66.7	6 33.3	0	0	18 100%
Japanese business practices	6 33.3	10 55.6	2 11.1	0	18 100%
Interpersonal skills-- superiors and supervisors	16 88.9	2 11.1	0	0	18 100%
Interpersonal skills-- co-workers at work	14 77.8	4 22.2	0	0	18 100%
Interpersonal skills-- co-workers after work	6 33.3	12 66.7	0	0	18 100%

good or good ratings. One company commented that they were very pleased with the intern's attitude as he actively participated in company-sponsored activities such as extracurricular trips, parties, etc. On the other hand, two companies stated that in their experience, female interns did not associate much with Japanese workers after work. One company noted that an intern who lived in the company dorm should have participated more in company-sponsored activities and been more open to his Japanese co-workers.

As indicated in Table 2, the intern's preparedness and contributions were appraised highly. Outstanding evaluations were given in the areas of preparation and contribution in the performance of projects assigned and in the area of internationalization of the organization.

Table 2

Rating the Intern's Preparation and/or Contribution to the Work

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
Daily work in the section or department assigned	6 33.3	12 66.7	0	0	18 100%
Work on assigned project(s)	16 88.9	2 11.1	0	0	18 100%
Work in the company's international operations	6 33.3	12 66.7	0	0	18 100%
Internationalization of the organization	16 88.9	2 11.1	0	0	18 100%

Two companies who included comments stated that the intern, the only foreign employee in their office, was a valuable resource for the Japanese employees to learn about American culture as well as to look at their own culture from an outsider's point of view. Another positive comment was that the computer programs that the intern prepared

for company operations were so useful that they became a model for other programs used in the firm.

Except for two negative scores in the area of the intern's language preparation, all companies indicated that the interns had met expectations in the areas of language, cultural, and business preparation as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Meeting the Sponsoring Company's Expectations

	Yes	No	Uncertain	Total
Language preparation of the intern	16 88.9	2 11.1	0	18 100%
Cultural preparation of the intern	18 100	0	0	18 100%
Business preparation of the intern	18 100	0	0	18 100%

One company that indicated interns did not meet expectations in the area of language preparation stated that the language ability differs depending upon the intern, but reading and writing ability tends to be weak in general.

Development of oral proficiency in the language is emphasized in the MIBS Japanese specialization, and sponsoring companies are informed of the possible weakness of the intern's reading and writing competence prior to the internship. For internships at very traditional Japanese companies, it is necessary to train the student with more reading and writing skills.

At the conclusion of the internship, the MIBS internship promoter visits the sponsoring companies and discusses the intern's performance and contribution to the

company. At this time the completed evaluation form is collected. Nearly all companies indicate that they have been pleased with the intern's performance, and that the intern has made considerable contribution to their international operations. Consequently, the majority of companies indicate that they are interested in sponsoring further internships.

Company Experience with Internship Accomodation to American Graduate Business Students

Almost all large- and medium-sized Japanese companies have their own in-house training programs for newly graduated recruits. These new employees receive training in all aspects of work at the company, enabling them to work in various departments. This facilitates transferring employees to different positions and maintaining low levels of unemployment. It also creates a stable system of lifelong employment. More importantly, these training programs include a kind of moral training to develop self-discipline, reinforce the employee's identification with the company, strengthen bonds of solidarity, and enhance harmony among employees.

In spite of having such systematized in-house training programs for Japanese employees, training programs in the field of management for interns who have no affiliation with the company is quite rare. Even providing internship training to students of foreign universities at all was unheard of until quite recently. However, many large companies have recently started internship programs of one kind or another to foreign students for the purpose of having them learn about Japanese corporations and for the Internationalization of the company's operations. Some Japanese companies offer training programs to foreign employees from related companies, their affiliates, and overseas subsidiaries. Judging from talks with many companies that have sponsored internships to foreign students, most offered

only short-term internships, and many of these were not in structured or defined internship programs.

Prior to the six-month internship of the MIBS program in Japan, the student and the person in charge of the internship at the host company normally discuss the type of work and/or projects to be assigned during the internship. The host company is requested to submit an outline of the assignments decided upon to the MIBS internship supervisor. In addition, the MIBS internship promoter normally discusses the details of the internship when he finalizes the intern's placement during his visit to Japan in May of each year.

In general, students who have interned at companies in Japan have been satisfied with their training. They have indicated that, as far as learning how a Japanese company operates, the training was meaningful, and the experience has been beneficial to their future careers. The degree of the student's satisfaction and learning differs depending upon the host company, its country of origin, the type and size of its operations, and the company's past internship experiences. The students' preparation for the internship and the adequate matching of interests between the host company and the student also play a major role.

There have been a few cases in which interns were dissatisfied due to the host company's inexperience with sponsoring a foreign student, and not knowing quite how to provide adequate training. Others have been frustrated because they were not given any degree of responsibility during internships at Japanese companies. However, a newly hired Japanese employee would not be given any degree of responsibility either. Therefore, it is not unnatural that foreign interns who have no "real" affiliation to the company are treated as temporary workers, and given little responsibility.

Table 4 shows results of questions which sought to discover host company's experiences in accommodating the MIBS interns. None of the companies responding

Table 4

Company Experience with Internship Accommodation

	Yes	No	Uncertain	Total
Difficulty or problem in assigning projects or work to the interns	0	18 100	0	18 100%
Difficulty or problem supervising the interns	0	18 100	0	18 100%
Difficulty or problem working with the interns	0	18 100	0	18 100%
Company learning from the intern	12 66.7	0	6 33.3	18 100%
Areas in the company needing improvement to accommodate interns	8 44.4	8 44.4	2 11.1	18 100%

indicated that they had difficulties or problems in assigning projects or work to the interns, in supervising the interns, or in co-worker relations with the interns.

Twelve (66.7%) of the companies indicated that they thought that their company learned from the intern, as well as the intern learning from them. Others indicated that they were uncertain about this. Four companies commented that by working with foreign interns, company employees were able to learn about American attitudes towards, and behavior at work. Some commented that they learned how complex it can be to assimilate non-Japanese workers into the organization. One Japanese company also commented that it was able to learn about American and Japanese markets from an American point of view.

Eight respondents (44.4%) indicated that there are areas in the company that need to be improved to better accommodate the intern. Five respondents specified areas

including the improvement of internship training for female interns, more intensive use of interns from the start of the internship, establishment of a more defined program for foreign interns, establishment of a more structured training program similar to that for new company employees, and improvements in living arrangements like company dormitories.

Judging from the results of the survey and discussions with people at the host companies and the students themselves, the companies did not have much difficulty in actually carrying out the internship responsibility. Rather, they have been very positive about participating in the MIBS internship program in Japan.

Based on the experience of the program, and taking into account comments from both sponsoring companies and students, subsidiaries of foreign companies in Japan are more willing to sponsor internships, and assign specific projects with greater responsibilities. Interns who work in these companies are more apt to be treated like any other new employee of the company. However, in newly recruited Japanese companies, sufficient coordination between the company and the MIBS internship coordinator must take place. Furthermore, more structured internship projects must be planned between the host company and the intern at these companies.

Conclusions

The MIBS internship program in Japan has been successfully operation thanks to the understanding and cooperation of the host companies. In general, the intern students were satisfied with the training they received and the host companies were, in turn, very favorable in providing training. Although the internship experience differed depending upon the company (Japanese companies vs. foreign subsidiary companies, inexperienced companies vs. experienced companies), the students have learned extensively about Japanese corporate

culture, structure, and strategy.

Companies that responded to the survey indicated that they did not have any major difficulties or problems in sponsoring the six-month internship to the MIBS students. Also, the majority of these companies indicated that they had also learned from the experience of sponsoring the internship to the MIBS students.

Although there are still many areas that could be improved to establish better internship programs in Japan, it can be concluded that the internship is realizing its purpose of providing an opportunity for the students to apply the Japanese language and business knowledge gained in the program, while testing their ability to adapt to a Japanese work environment and learn about Japanese corporate cultures, strategies, and operations.

An increasing number of Japanese companies that have operations in the United States, and U.S. companies that have operations in Japan are now interested in hiring more U.S. nationals with Japanese proficiency and a working knowledge of Japanese corporate culture who are capable of working in a Japanese working environment. Accordingly, more companies are now positively considering sponsoring internship training to foreign students in the area of business management.

Development of new companies to sponsor internships requires a time-consuming effort and good communication with the company through the proper channels. However, as long as such efforts are made patiently and properly, the establishment of more and better internship programs in Japan is promising with the current trend toward internationalization in Japan.

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Appendix

Short Survey Questionnaire on the

MIBS Internship Program in Japan

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SURVEY OF MIBS INTERNSHIP PROGRAM IN JAPAN

Please answer the questions by circling the number that best represents your opinion and write comments either in English or Japanese.

MIBS Intern

1. How do you rate the intern's ability, preparation, or attitude in the following areas?

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
a. Japanese language ability in general	1	2	3	4
b. Japanese language-daily conversation skills	1	2	3	4
c. Japanese language-conversation skills at work	1	2	3	4
d. Japanese language-reading skills	1	2	3	4
e. Japanese language-writing skills	1	2	3	4
f. Japanese culture, society and people	1	2	3	4
g. Japanese business practice	1	2	3	4
h. Interpersonal relations with superiors and supervisors	1	2	3	4
i. Interpersonal skills with Japanese workers at work	1	2	3	4
j. Interpersonal skills with Japanese workers after work	1	2	3	4
k. Other_____ _____	1	2	3	4

Comments _____

2 How do you rate the intern's preparation and/or contribution in the following areas?

a. daily work in the section or department assigned	1	2	3	4
b. work in the project assigned	1	2	3	4
c. work in the company's international operations (in Japan or overseas)	1	2	3	4
d. internationalization of the organization	1	2	3	4
e. other _____	1	2	3	4

Comments _____

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		Yes	No	Uncertain
3.	Do you think the intern has met your expectations or your company's in the following areas?			
	a. language preparation	1	2	3
	b. cultural preparation	1	2	3
	c. business preparation	1	2	3

Comments _____

Sponsoring Company

		Yes	No	Uncertain
1.	Did you have any difficulties or problems in assigning projects or work to the intern?	1	2	3
	Comments _____			
2.	Did you have any difficulties or problems supervising the intern?	1	2	3
	Comments _____			
3.	Did your company's employees have difficulties or problems working with the intern?	1	2	3
	Comments _____			
4.	Do you think your company also learned from the intern?	1	2	3
	Comments _____			
5.	Do you think there would be any items or areas in your company that need to be improved for better accommodating the intern?	1	2	3
	Please specify _____			

General Comments or Suggestions for Improvement

Please write any comments or suggestions you may have about the MIBS internship program (either in Japanese or in English) on the back of this sheet.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.